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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2018

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SUBJECT: ERITREA PLANS TO SEEK FULL MEMBERSHIP IN ARAB
LEAGUE

Classified By: AMB RONALD K. MCMULLEN FOR REASON 1.4(d).

11. (C) Eritrea plans to seek full membership in the Arab League and to sponsor a "new generation of opposition" in Darfur, according to an Asmara-based Egyptian diplomat.

12. (C) On May 2, Egyptian Political Chief Hassam Abdallah Nooreldin (Hassam) briefed DCM on a meeting several days prior between a visiting Egyptian delegation and Abdella Jabir, Head of Organizational Affairs for the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), Eritrea's ruling (and sole) political party. In a conversation that Hassam described as "surprisingly open," Jabir informed the Egyptians that Eritrea was planning two strategic moves in the upcoming months/year: first, to request full membership in the Arab League; secondly, to build a "new generation of opposition" in Darfur (to be reported septel). Hassam noted that Eritrea is currently an observer to the Arab League, and commented that the Government of State of Eritrea (GSE) had pushed hard to attend the March 2008 Arab League Summit in Damascus and place the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute on the agenda. According to Hassam, the Arab League had declined Eritrea's request as the March summit's agenda was "full" and focused on Lebanon. Hassam added that Abdella also stated that the GSE would seek to join "any international forum" as part of its foreign policy strategy. Hassam viewed the GSE's objectives as primarily focused on gaining support for its position on the Eritrean-Ethiopian border dispute. When asked whether Egypt would support Eritrea's bid for full membership, Hassam was non-committal but noted that "the Arab League works very slowly."

13. (C) Comment: Abdella, as one of the GSE's key foreign policy advisors, numbers among the few Eritrean interlocutors "in-the-know" about GSE plans and intentions. His comments to the Egyptians track with GSE activities in recent years to ally itself more closely with Arab countries as a political counterweight to Ethiopia. A predominate amount of foreign travel of GSE and PFDJ officials since 2006 has been to meet with leaders in the Gulf, Middle East, and Northern Africa, including the May 1 trip by Eritrea's Foreign Minister to meet with Syrian President Bashir Al-Assad and his May 5 trip to Tehran to meet with the Iranian Foreign Minister. Not atypically, GSE strategy and actual activities lack consistency, however. The GSE's recent incursion into the Ras Doumeira territory of Arab League member Djibouti would seemingly run counter to its objective of wooing the Arab countries into accepting it into the fold -- particularly if the reason behind the incursion was GSE displeasure at Djibouti's agreement to host a mid-May meeting aimed at

reconciling Somali Transitional Federal Government and Asmara-based Somali opposition leaders. The conclusions of the Arab's League upcoming "fact-finding" mission to Ras Doumeira, a mission resulting at the request of Djibouti, may provide a clear indicator of the GSE's likelihood of finding a home in the League in the near future.

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